

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The United States House of Representatives passed the Welfare Reform Act (H.R. 4737) today by a vote of 229-197.

Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the House Ways and Means Committee, voted against the bill.

If signed into law, H.R. 4737 would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program through fiscal year 2007. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 effectively put an end to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and replaced it with TANF, a block grant program aimed at moving the nation's impoverished away from welfare and into work. Whether or not TANF has been a success continues to be debated on Capitol Hill.

During the two day debate, Rep. Becerra said, "We have a bill before us that provides inflexible and unfunded mandates: Inflexible because the states will not have much choice on how to manage their welfare rolls and to use what they have learned through best practices to try to decrease their rolls; and unfunded because those requirements do not give the states the flexibility to use the monies where they believe best."

Rep. Becerra was especially concerned with H.R. 4737's lack of investment in proper child care. "The Republican welfare bill does nothing to deal with reality," Rep. Becerra said. "This welfare reform bill does child care on the cheap. We should understand that one out of every seven American children who qualifies for day care gets it, the other six do not. It tells American children and American mothers, who are being told that they have a full workweek of 40 hours, that you must do with what you have, because the states will be provided a pittance over the next five years to try to accommodate that growing number of kids that need child care. How do we do that? Well, in California, with close to 300,000 kids right now on day care waiting lists, we would need over \$1 billion to implement this

Republican welfare bill, and that's just for child care. And how much money does this welfare bill give to child care nationwide over the next five years? A paltry one billion dollars. So every single dime that is provided in this bill for child care could be used by one state, the State of California."

A Democratic substitute of the Welfare Reform Act was offered up that mandated \$11 billion be spent on child care funding over the next five years. H.R. 4737 only calls for \$1 billion. Unfortunately, the Democratic substitute was voted down today by a vote of 198-222.